

ENTREPRENEURIAL LEGACY

JOHN DUDLEY STITES

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Entrepreneur – Farmer-Community Leader-Craftman-Familyman.

Those terms and more describe what John D. Stites did in his 86 years of life.



“He was kind of a John Wayne-type of fellow,” his son, Johnny, CEO of J&S Construction, said. “He was able to take the smallest things in life and teach important life lessons from them.”

Stites passed away peacefully at home on the family farm August 10, 2013.

(Pictured: John Stites Sr., left, is pictured with Bill Smith of the Bill Smith Machinery Company, a business Stites purchased in the early ‘70s. The business then became known as John Stites & Sons Construction Company and is now one of the largest construction firms in the Upper Cumberland).

And in those 86 years of life, he was involved in a lot, from impacting a large number of people through his civic activities to starting one of the area’s largest construction firms.

Building blocks from small beginnings:

Stites’ legacy began after his service in the U. S. Navy during World War II. He came back to Cookeville to attend college, but in 1947, he left college to join the family business, Builders Supply Company, a company his father had a hand in beginning.



That was when his entrepreneurial spirit started to emerge. He designed and built the first ready mix concrete plant and introduced the first ready mix concrete trucks to the area.

(Pictured: John D. Stites is pictured holding his son, John Jr., at Builders Supply Company around 1947).

“He helped provide concrete for the first Buffalo Valley bridge,” Johnny said. “He set up material, sand and gravel on the construction site, since it was too far to carry.”



He also provided the sand and grains for the Standing Stone State Park bridge.

(Pictured: John D. Stites is pictured among the lumber that was offered at Wholesale building Materials around 1959. This is one of the many steps he took before starting J&S Construction, now one of the Upper Cumberland’s largest construction firms).

Eventually, he was bought out of the Builders Supply Company and later started his own company – Wholesale Building Materials.

This was the first cash and carry lumber yard, initially selling lumber and building materials from railroad cars because there was no building for his inventory.

“I remember going down to the train yard as a young boy to help unload lumber and other materials,” Johnny recalled. “He really taught us, his kids, the value of hard work.”

In 1957, he founded J&S Construction after purchasing the Bill Smith Machinery Company.

It began as a small residential construction firm through building materials he had accumulated.

Originally, it was called John Stites and Sons Construction, but the name was shortened to J & S Construction.

It was also much smaller then – there were four to five people working for the business at the time.

In the early ‘70s, Johnny and Jack came back home and joined their father in the business.

Johnny had only been in the position three years when his father left the business.

“He came in to my office one day and said, ‘do you understand what we’re doing here?’” Johnny recalled, “I said, ‘Yeah, I think I do.’ He patted me on the shoulder, said ‘Good,’ and left.”

And he never came back

“He never criticized and never asked us what we were doing,” Johnny said. “He trusted his kids to perform.”

It wasn’t until the late ‘70s that the construction business really took off and started to grow. “I don’t think he ever dreamed it’d be this big,” Johnny said.

“He used the business to be a tool to reach out to the community.”

Some examples of that include donating material to build the office building from the Mustard Seed Ranch, building a Habitat for Humanity house and co-sponsoring the Monterey High School’s Virtual Enterprise Class website, and endowing an engineering scholarship at Tennessee Tech, among other things.

Now, the next generation of the Stites family is involved in the business.

“We’re blessed to have great people here and I know he was proud to have them here, too,” Johnny said.

Community Man:

Stites was also known for his activities in a number of organizations throughout the county – from being a founding member of the Jaycees and the Cookeville Country Club to being a Scoutmaster.



“Through his scouting efforts, he really made an impact on a lot of boys lives,” Johnny said. “At the funeral (which was held last Monday), a lot of people came and shared stories of his scouting influence.”

He also had a hand in developing Ironwood Golf Course, the first public 18-hole golf course in Putnam County.

(Pictured: Ironwood Golf Course was one of the John D. Stites’ many developments around Cookeville and Putnam County. He’s pictured with Wes Flatt Jr., partner in the development. This photo was taken around 1970).

He also built and managed the Upper Cumberland’s first nursing home, Cookeville Nursing Home, which was sold in 1980.

Through his creative side, he built a workshop on the farm and would crate unique pieces for his children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

“A few of his pieces are even in the J&S offices,” Johnny said. “I remember he’d watch the DIY network and then go out into the workshop to try his hand at making whatever he saw on TV. He was always reading, learning new things and just always thinking outside the box.

“He found his niche and stuck to it.”

And his legacy lives on in his business.

John Dudley Stites Obt.

b. 23 August 1926, Algood, Putnam Co., TN – d. 10 August 2013, Cookeville, Putnam Co., TN, md **Evelyne Ruth (Flatt) Stites**. John Dudley Stites, s/o **Clarence Elsworth “Pat” Stites** (1887-1949) & **Mary “Fannie” Hampton** (1893-1957).

John Dudley Stites, long time businessman in the Upper Cumberland region and founder of J&S



Construction Company, Inc. died peacefully at his home on Saturday, August 10, 2013 at 6:11 am on the family farm, J&S Farms. He was with his wife of 68 years, **Evelyne Ruth Flatt Stites** and his three children and their spouses. He is survived by his wife, three children **John D Stites II** and wife **Rosemary Tillman Stites**, **James Richard (Jack) Stites** and his wife **Mary Alice Norris Stites** and **Sarah Jane Stites Davidson** and her husband **Donald Houston (Donnie) Davidson**. Mr. Stites and his wife have 11 grandchildren and 26 great grandchildren. He is also survived by his nephew James E. (Jimmy) French of Franklin, Tennessee. Mr. Stites was a member of the Collegese Church of Christ and is best remembered for his simple teaching methods: whether in church or on the farm.

John Stites was born on August 23, 1926 in Algood, Tennessee to the late **Clarence Elsworth Stites** and **Fannie Hampton Stites**. He had one sister, the late **Sarah Stites French** of Nashville, TN. Upon graduation from Algood High School, he served in the US Navy at Guam during World War II. Upon his honorable discharge from the service, he attended Tennessee Tech, but left school to join the family business, Builders Supply Company, in 1947, which was started by his father, **Patrick Elsworth Stites** and a partner, **H. T. Pointer**; also of Algood. While at Builders Supply Company, John Stites designed and built the first ready mix concrete plant and introduced the first ready mix concrete trucks to the area. He introduced the first cash and carry lumber yard, initially selling lumber and building materials from railroad cars, because he had not yet constructed a building to house his inventory. In 1957 Mr. Stites founded J&S Construction Company as a small residential construction firm and the enterprise has grown to be one of the largest construction firms in the Upper Cumberland region.

Mr. Stites built and managed, with his partners, the first nursing home in the Upper Cumberland area. He and his brother-in-law, **Wesley Flatt Jr.** built Ironwood Golf Course, the first public 18 hole golf course in Putnam County. Always the inventor, he designed a workshop at his farm, J&S Farms, where he used lumber from the family farm to construct hope chests for his great-granddaughters and steamer trunks for his great-grandsons. He also made cedar chests for his grandchildren. Ma and PaPa Stites were perhaps best known for their July 4th pig roast that began in 1962 and occurs each year on July 4th with family and friends.

John Stites gave back to the community in many ways, including being one of the founding members of the

Cookeville Country Club and the Cookeville Jaycees. He was scoutmaster of Boy Scout troop #156 for over a decade and was responsible for many young men reaching the rank of Eagle, including his two sons and one grandson, **Joshua Norris Stites**.

Visitation with the family is scheduled for Sunday evening at the CLC of Collegese Church of Christ, August 11 from 5:00 pm to 8:00 pm and Monday afternoon, August 12th from 1:00 pm till the time of the funeral. Funeral services for John Dudley Stites will be Monday afternoon at 3:00 pm at Collegese Church of Christ. Brother Joe Roberts, minister at Collegese Church of Christ will be officiating at the services. **Burial will be in the Algood City Cemetery** immediately following the services. Pall Bearers will be the grandchildren.

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*Read more about the people and places of Putnam Co., TN & surrounding areas at:
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